Academic Book Reviews in Web of Science

Book reviews can often be found in aggregator databases such as EBSCO’s Academic Search Complete, Gale’s Academic OneFile, and ProQuest Central. In addition, there are databases dedicated to academic book reviews like Book Review Digest (an H.W. Wilson database via EBSCO) and Book Review Index Online (Gale). But a rather hidden benefit to Web of Science is that reviews to academic books can be found in it.

Since a book review is, by definition, a cited reference, search for book reviews by doing a cited reference search in Web of Science. Suppose we wanted to find reviews of David G. McCullough’s 2001 Pulitzer Prize–winning work John Adams. Because citing authors have no authority control over them in Web of Science, you need to be generous in setting up your search.

Step 1: I highly recommend that you do not simply enter author names in the search box. From the Cited Reference Search page, look for the pull-down menu selection for Cited Author. Under that you will see a “Select from Index” search option. We need to use the search box in the cited author index to add all possible permutations of this author’s name. I’ll start by searching McCullough, D* in the Cited Author field, and John Adams in the Cited Work field (because, after all, a book review cites the work) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Entering search criteria for a book review in Web of Science.

The results page shows abbreviated titles, so we can “Show Expanded Titles” to see the full book titles (Figure 2).
Figure 2. Expanding Cited Work Titles in Web of Science.

It seems that all the results are for the correct item, so I can “Select Page” to select all 20 titles, limit by document type “Book Review,” and finally hit the Finish Search button (Figure 3).
Figure 3. Selecting book review records to display in Web of Science.
This gives us a nice result set of 14 book reviews from scholarly journals (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Book review results in Web of Science.